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## THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF PELLAGRA.

A REPORT OF THE SECOND TRIENNIAL MEETING HELD AT  
COLUMBIA, S. C., OCTOBER 3-4, 1912.

By C. H. LAVINDER, Surgeon, United States Public Health Service.

The second triennial meeting of the Association for the Study of Pellagra occurred at Columbia, S. C., October 3 and 4, 1912, the sessions being held at the State Hospital for the Insane. The meeting was well attended and much interest was shown in the long program.

After the invocation and a few words of welcome by the governor of the State, the president of the association, Dr. J. W. Babcock, delivered an interesting address on the history of pellagra in the State of South Carolina.

The program contained some 65 papers on the various phases of pellagra, and covered the etiology, epidemiology, statistics, local history, diagnosis, laboratory investigations, clinical features, treatment and miscellaneous aspects of the disease. There were several contributions from European students, most of which were simply read by title, their authors not being present.

At the first evening session an address was delivered by Surg. Gen. Rupert Blue on the "Problem of pellagra." Among other important things he emphasized the need of men and money adequate to meet the difficulties of this very perplexing subject; and urged upon the States the necessity of making this disease reportable in order that proper statistical evidence might be secured as to the gravity and extent of this problem in the United States.

Resolutions were passed by the association on several matters. Some of these resolutions may be briefly summarized. The belief was expressed that the ultimate cause of pellagra is unknown, but that in view of the incrimination of spoiled corn "measures should be taken by the proper authorities to prevent its sale and consumption as food." The conviction was expressed that "no satisfactory evidence has ever been submitted which shows pellagra to be directly transmissible from man to man; and, in the present state of our knowledge this association regards measures of quarantine and isolation for this disease unnecessary and unwise." The opinion was also expressed that "there is at present no known specific remedy for pellagra; and any claim made for this specificity of any especial therapeutic agent must be accepted with great caution." Pellagra was recognized in the United States as "a matter of great importance to the national public health" and approval was expressed of the interest displayed in this disease by the Public Health Service. The hope was expressed that "the Congress of the United States may appropriate sufficient funds for the continuance and extension of this work."

Officers were elected, and the association adjourned without any final decision as to the time and place of the next meeting, leaving this matter in the hands of the president and board of directors.

The character of the papers presented was good, and a large number of them showed evidence of much hard work on various features of the malady. The general tone of the meeting was encouraging, and it was abundantly evident that American students of the disease had come to recognize the need of less speculation and more work if important results are to be achieved. There was of course

a certain amount of speculation, especially on the etiology, but most of this had some basis in real, honest work. While recognizing distinctly the importance which spoiled corn may bear to the disease, there was a distinct tendency to question the specificity of this relation, and to view the disease as perhaps due to some profound metabolic disturbance in which spoiled corn might be very largely concerned. There was equally evident a feeling, almost a conviction, that the disease is of an infectious nature, and probably insect-borne. Between these two extremes there ranged a variety of views on the subject.

Without attempting to go into details, there were presented several papers which brought out important observations. The Thompson-McFadden Commission, which has been at work this season in South Carolina, presented papers on metabolism, bacteriology with especial reference to agglutination work, and epidemiology. Among these the paper presented by Jennings and King, from the entomological side, suggested the *stomoxys* fly as the possible carrier.

Beall, of Texas, presented a statistical and epidemiological study of the disease in Texas, and sharply brought out the observation, based on mortality reports, that there is a great disparity in the number of males and females affected; and further, that for the first two decades of life the death rate in the two sexes is about equal, while with the beginning of the third decade the female death rate rises while the male death rate does not rise. This female death rate continues disproportionately high till about the close of the fourth decade when it descends to meet again the male death rate.

Alsberg, Black, and Marsh, of the Department of Agriculture, presented interesting papers on the metabolism of molds found on spoiled corn and the results of feeding experiments with some of these molds. They showed that to speak of "spoiled corn" is to be very inaccurate, since the character of the chemical changes associated with this "spoiling" is by no means uniform. The ordinary blue mold, *Penicillium*, to which much importance has been attributed by the Italian school, has been found up to the present time, by Thom, to present some 30 varieties, all of them differentiated by their biologic products, some of which are toxic and some not. These workers have isolated two pure chemical substances from two different strains of these molds and are still working with these substances. In their feeding experiments on rats with some varieties of *Penicillium* they obtained a mycotic broncho-pneumonia, showing that at least some varieties of *Penicillium* are pathogenic for rats.

Bravetta presented a brief paper regarding the microorganism which Tizzoni claims to have isolated from pellagrins and which he has regarded as the specific cause of the disease. Bravetta's conclusions were that no such specific microorganism exists, and he regards the microorganism as simply a contamination. He stated that he had sent Tizzoni some blood from nonpellagrous individuals and in this blood Tizzoni had found his microorganism and grown a pure culture.

Volpino and his associates presented a paper describing an anaphylactic reaction in pellagrins from the subcutaneous or intramuscular injections of aqueous extracts of spoiled corn; and they had prepared from this aqueous extract a substance, which they called "pellagrogenina," which gave the same reaction. All controls failed to give the reaction. Their observations were based on a large series of cases.

Saunders read an interesting paper on the association of beriberi with pellagra in several cases in the asylum for the insane at Columbia, S. C. With regard to this matter it was brought out that the dietary of this institution about a year ago had been modified by the elimination of all corn and its substitution by rice. Subsequent to this in certain parts of the institution, at least, recrudescences of pellagra apparently were much reduced, and beriberi made its appearance, being several times associated with pellagra in the same individual.

The treatment of pellagra by salvarsan was discussed at some length, and in spite of the amazing results reported by Martin, it was the unanimous opinion that this remedy had little effect on pellagra. The general impression seemed to be that the treatment of pellagra, if carefully carried out, offered hopeful results; that drugs had little effect on the progress of the disease; and that the essentials are rest, diet, hydrotherapy, psychotherapy, and such symptomatic remedies as the case demands.

Singer and Pollock presented an admirable study of the histopathology of the central nervous system; Adler presented experimental results in rabbits from overfeeding on fats; Hirschfelder discussed fluorescent bodies in the blood of pellagrins; Cooper reported on intestinal parasites in pellagrins and nonpellagrins; Rice presented a study of pellagra among children in orphanages; Bass and Tucker brought out the importance of not overlooking mild cases; Hunter presented an experimental study of Sambon's hypothesis using the *Simulium* fly and the monkey; Sambon's hypothesis was presented at length in papers by himself and by his followers in America. Lavinder and Grim presented papers on the statistics and epidemiology of the disease. Many other papers presented interesting points.

The officers elected were as follows: Passed Asst. Surg. C. H. Lavinder, Public Health Service, president; Capt. J. F. Siler, Medical Corps, United States Army, first vice president; Dr. C. C. Bass, Tulane University, New Orleans, second vice president; Dr. J. W. Babcock, superintendent State Hospital for Insane, Columbia, S. C., secretary; Dr. J. A. Hayne, State health officer South Carolina, treasurer.

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## PELLAGRA IN ITALY.

### A NOTE ON THE PREVALENCE DURING THE YEARS 1881-1899-1910.

By C. H. Lavinder, Surgeon, United States Public Health Service.

The statistical table of the prevalence and distribution of pellagra in Italy, which follows, appeared in the *Rivista Pellagologica Italiana* of July, 1912. It was arranged by G. B. Cantarutti from official figures. The *Rivista* is a bimonthly publication, devoted exclusively to pellagra, and is the official organ of the "Permanent Committee of the International League against Pellagra and of the Pellagologic Commissions of Italy." It is needless to add that on the etiological side it represents the Lombrosian theory of "spoiled" corn.

It will be noted in the table that the ratio of pellagrins is figured on the rural population, and not on the general population of the Kingdom. The reason for this is that in Italy pellagra is almost exclusively a rural disease, and the urban population is exempt.